

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 ACDA-12 EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00 STR-07 CEA-01
COME-00 HA-05 DOE-15 SOE-02 AID-05 /132 W
-----002140 212211Z/14

P 212049Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7168
INFO USINT HAVANA

C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 02090

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, CU, CA
SUBJECT: GOC AID POLICY TOWARDS CUBA: IN LIMBO

REF: OTTAWA 1494

1. CANADIAN POLICY TOWARDS CUBA, AT LEAST AS TO AID, IS PRESENTLY IN STATE OF LIMBO FOR VARIETY OF REASONS. THIS WAS GENERAL IMPRESSION EMBOFF RECEIVED AFTER APRIL 20 DISCUSSION WITH FRASER, ACTING DIR. OF LA DIV., EXTAFF, AND EXTAFF CUBAN DESK OFFICER.

2. CANADIAN AID PACKAGE (10 MILLION LINE OF CREDIT AND ABOUT 4 AND 1/2 MILLION TECH ASSISTANCE) ENDED AS OF MARCH 31. CUBANS HAVE COME IN WITH NEW SHOPPING LIST, FRASER SAID, AND GOC HAS INDICATED TO THEM THAT IT IS "STUDYING" MATTER. IN FACT, FRASER CONFIDED, "STUDYING" IS EUPHUMISM FOR NO ACTION AT ALL BECAUSE OF PRESENT POLITICAL CLIMATE HERE.

3. MODEST AS GOC AID WAS, TRUDEAU GOV HAS BEEN UNDER STRONG ATTACK FROM OPPOSITION TORY PARTY IN HOUSE OF COMMONS FOR SYMPATHETIC STANCE VIS A VIS CUBA (TRUDEAU'S "VIVA CASTRO"
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REMARK REMAINS A RALLYING CRY--FOR THE OPPOSITION) WHILE CUBA WHEELS AND DEALS IN AFRICA. FRASER STATED PERSONAL OPINION THAT TORY CRITICISM REFLECTS SENTIMENT OF MANY CANADIANS. IN ANY CASE, HE INDICATED THAT GOVERNMENT IS SENSITIVE TO THIS CRITICISM AND THAT THERE WILL BE NO MOVEMENT ON A POSSIBLE NEW CUBAN AID PACKAGE UNTIL AFTER COMING NATIONAL ELECTIONS. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER ELECTIONS,

HE SAID, IS HARD TO PREDICT.

4. FRASER ASSERTED THAT SOME GOC AID TO CUBA MAY BE CRUCIAL IN KEEPING OPEN A "WINDOW" IN HAVANA, AND HE ADDED THAT THIS SHOULD BE OF INTEREST TO THE U.S. WHICH HAS BENEFITTED FROM CANADIAN EMBASSY ACCESS IN CUBA. DISCONTINUING OR DRASTICALLY CUTTING GOC AID COULD, HE CLAIMED, CAUSE CUBAN BACKLASH AGAINST GOC TO DETRIMENT OF BOTH GOC AND U.S. HE ADMITTED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE WAS LESS ALTRUISTIC CANADIAN MOTIVE INVOLVED SINCE CANADA RUNS 4 TO 1 FAVORABLE TRADE BALANCE WITH CUBA. FRASER EXPRESSED INTEREST IN US VIEWS ON POSSIBLE GOC AID TO CUBA AND CLAIMED THAT SUCH VIEWS WOULD BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT AFTER ELECTIONS WHEN MATTER IS CONSIDERED BY GOC.

5. COMMENT: TRUDEAU GOV CLEARLY IS FEELING THE HEAT ON CUBAN QUESTION AND THE LESS SAID ON IT DURING ELECTION CAMPAIGN THE BETTER FOR THEIR PURPOSES. TO LIMIT DAMAGE, EXTAFF MIN JAMIESON HAS TAKEN PAINS TO OUTLINE PUBLICLY GOC DISSATISFACTION WITH CUBAN AFRICAN ADVENTURES. MOST RECENTLY IN HOUSE ON APRIL 18, HE SAID THAT, "WE DEPLORE UNEQUIVOCALLY THE PRESENCE OF CUBAN FORCES IN AFRICA OR ANYWHERE ELSE WHERE THERE ARE TROUBLES OF THAT KIND." HE HAS AVOIDED, HOWEVER, TIEING AID QUESTION TO CUBAN AFRICAN PRESENCE. SIMILARLY, AT APRIL 20 PRESS CONFERENCE, IN ANSWER TO QUESTION ON CUBA, TRUDEAU INDICATED THAT GOC DID

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NOT LINK HUMANITARIAN AID AND POLITICS OF RECIPIENT COUNTRY. BUT HE KEPT HIS ANSWER VAGUE AND LOW-KEY.

6. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER ELECTIONS IS INDEED HARD TO PREDICT. IN UNLIKELY EVENT THAT TORIES TAKE POWER, GOC-CUBAN RELATIONS WILL COOL (REFTEL). EVEN WITH TORIES, HOWEVER, RELATIONS WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO DETERIORATE TO POINT WHERE FAVORABLE GOC TRADE IS JEOPARDIZED. AND SOME AID MAY BE PRICE FOR THIS. SHOULD TRUDEAU RETURN, WE ESTIMATE THAT, DESPITE TRUDEAU'S PERSONAL FASCINATION WITH CASTRO AND GOC LONG-STANDING RELATIONSHIP WITH CUBA, NEW TRUDEAU GOV WILL AVOID HIGH-PROFILE RELATIONSHIP AS LONG AS CUBA IS ACTIVE IN AFRICA. MOST LIKELY, HOWEVER, IT WILL CONTINUE MODEST AID PROGRAM. END COMMENT.

7. ACTION REQUESTED: WHILE THERE WILL BE NO GOC MDVES TOWARDS CUBA UNTIL FALL AT EARLIEST (ELECTIONS ARE LIKELY TO BE HELD BY THEN), WE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY DEPARTMENT THINKING ON THIS SUBJECT FOR POSSIBLE DISCUSSION WITH EXTAFF OFFICIALS.

ENDERS

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, FOREIGN ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978OTTAWA02090
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780171-0854
Format: TEL
From: OTTAWA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780431/aaaaazqq.tel
Line Count: 115
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 8013efa9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 OTTAWA 1494
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2892038
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOC AID POLICY TOWARDS CUBA: IN LIMBO
TAGS: PEPR, EAID, CU, CA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8013efa9-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014